Nothing urgent here -- just wordiness.

5 February 1971

Dear Harold:

Under separate cover we're sending you photocopies of our files from the S-I from the time you ceased getting it, through Jan. 30. As long as we continue to get this miserable rag (God, what a depressing newspaper) we'll continue to protect you, although if postal rates are doubled as threatened we may have to give it up. I apologize for the quality of these copies, due apparently to a bad batch of paper. Some are barely readable. If any are especially important and you need better copies, just let us know the dates and we can have copies made down in the village.

This is in reply to yours of Jan. 23 and 25, with the various enclosures. Those for Hal have been sent along to him. By the way, if you wish anything sent to Paul Hoch, please provide the address for him you've been using. He used to be in the telephone book, but I would like to be reasonably certain that anything we might send to him will reach him.

We have heard nothing further from Hal, and assume this means there's no change in his status since last report. We are becoming just as puzzled as you over his emerging attitude, or lack of one. On the basis of what we know, which is little enough, we can ascribe it only to his extended joblessness and to the state of his affair with Cheryl, which remains a mystery to us. For the past two days we have tried to call him, but either no one answers the phone at all or he's not in.

The exchange of correspondence you sent regarding the gentleman in Los Angeles is interesting in that it strengthens the opinion we formed of him two years ago on the one occasion we actually met him. Before that, from talking to Hal, we always had assumed first that he probably was working for someone. Once we met him, however, this gave way to a feeling that it was more probable that he was a freelancer trying to pick up bits and pieces of information which he could peddle to someone. This was not based on any feeling of sympathy or admiration for him. Quite the contrary. We disliked him on sight, which is rare for both of us. The real basis of our judgment was experience with a number of people very much like him in the past -- in Peking, Shanghai, Tokyo, Washington. They all share common traits with him, from the basic quality of the grotesque, through the quick and cunning intelligence, the unfailing histrionic flair, the grandiose talk, the unerring nose for centers of power and wealth, the opportunistic tropism, and finally the tendency to bully, threaten and intimidate which always emerges. In other words, these people all would have been court jesters in another age, trading court gossip for small favors, playing on fears and suspicions, useful and at times used, but in the end never fully trusted by anyone. They never quite make it, but they dance and caper and make noises on the sidelines, sometimes amusing, sometimes on terror bent, while never being fully accepted into the mainstream of what goes on.

It seems to me that his central message is still what it was two years ago: you are all outnumbered and outgunned; why go on ? On the occasion we saw him he even broke out an Instamatic camera and went about taking pictures without permission of all the more than a dozen people at the meeting -- to which he had invited us.

So I doubt that he has the permanent backing or any organization. He may sell a tidbit here and there, but who would trust him on a permanent basis ? Did you ever hear of a court jester being promoted ?

From what you say, it does appear that you are going to have to make a choice in terms of priorities and do what you can about the things that seem most important to you. We feel sure you want to keep your options open, of course, but after studying your letter we ~~we~~ can see nothing else to be done if you are to avoid dispersing your energies (including your emotional energies) at the expense of what you really need to do. If other things must be neglected, that is unquestionably unfortunate, but only relatively so in terms of alternatives.

We made a comparable choice -- on a minute scale, of course -- a couple of years ago. In the first place, we never had contemplated seriously doing anything concrete with what we began collecting. Our central motive was to avoid being brainwashed, and was based on my entire experience, which is that if you watch closely enough you can keep reasonable track of what goes on and discern much more of its real direction than if you don't watch closely.

At the end of the first Shaw trial we decided to restrict ourselves almost entirely to organizing the material we had, as best we could, and working up a passable index to it, and this we have done -- at least it's passable for our purposes. Whether we ever will do anything with it is still entirely open. Certainly nothing can be done until after I retire a little less than two years from now. Even so, we have to resist the constant temptation to expand the area we're trying to keep track of, and it takes all our spare time and then some. You will understand, if anyone does, the friends we have lost during the past seven-plus years, simply because for their own amour propre they could not admit that anyone should be keeping track, since they themselves were not.

Aside from Hal, we have only one real friend who understands, or who even is interested in understanding, what we are trying to do and why. Even he now is basically discouraged and inactive. There is one other person, a Mill Valley woman, who sends us a few clippings now and then (we clip 10 times as much for her in her special interest area -- Latin America) but she doesn't consider our area one where she could function effectively, even though she is fully exercized about it.

These are the exceptions among the friends we had in 1963. The rest refuse fundamentally to look at it, and in effect deny our right to look at it. The reason, of course, is the subconscious feeling of guilt: that if they admitted there were anything to justify our interest, they too would be obligated as citizens to share and pursue it. Of course we have never implied they should, but the feeling of guilt apparently remains.

This appears most clearly perhaps in a European friend -- he's Jewish, who was an assistant prosecutor in Germany but escaped in the mid-thirties to a Scandinavian country and then came here in 1938 or so. He's teaching college German now and doing very well after a long and very hard pull. A man of his experience and background cannot refuse to discuss the assassination, and at times he even volunteers questions and indicates he realizes very well

the general drift of what has been happening here. But at first he refused to entertain the idea of a plot, and only gradually came to admit that something of the kind must have gone on. He handles the whole thing like a hot potato, and we finally have decided that his reluctance is rooted in his subconscious refusal to face the repetition here of what he saw happen in Germany. In other words, he simply cannot bear to think of going through that whole ghastly business again, and to us this is a considerably more valid excuse than any advanced by the various native-born Americans who should know better than to stick their heads in the sand. To us they have no real excuse for not facing facts, at least to some extent. What really irritates us about these Americans is the patronizing attitude they assume to protect their own egos.

There remains the problem you discuss: of those who have faced the facts, gone to work on them, done good work in many cases, and now appear to be subsiding or dropping out. The fact that some of them have let you down seems to us to be somewhat incidental: you are directly in the path of any such tendency. Buffdom being what it is, you naturally would be the first to feel the effects of any diminution of interest by others. This is so, not only because of your enormous activity, but because so many have depended upon you, consciously or otherwise, for leadership. It is you, in most cases, who have spotted areas for investitation. It is you, more than anyone, who has been ahead of the pack. If there is anything personal in this tendency of people not to live up to the promises they have made to you, we suspect that in most cases it is due simply to a feeling that they cannot measure up to what you have a right to expect.

In the meantime there are all the distractions that militate against a continued high level of activity on the part of most people, who are, after all, only part-time workers. Look back to 1963. How much does life now resemble life then ? Even if you had kept on doing only what you were doing prior to Nov. 22, and had taken on nothing else since then ? Life is simply harder for everyone, in a way that perhaps only those who have lived in overpopulated countries can readily recognize. OUr ways are losing their effectiveness, if the system isn't actually breaking down. Nothing much works unless one personally pursues it and makes it work, or pays exorbitantly if someone else can be persuaded to do it.

Add to that the increased difficulty of feeling right about anything. The war. Inflation. We all know it is only a matter of times, as things go, until the Americans will resort to tactical nuclear weapons in Indochina. The only alternative to that is to get out, and this is not in prospect. China will feel forced to enter the war in one way or another. Russia will be forced to live up to the mutual defense treaty, and we shall have had it. And we all know that as things are going now it is only a matter of time until American currency is devalued and inflation becomes far worse than it already is. Such considerations, whether consciously realized or not, cannot help but take their toll, and they take it in the area of research on the assassinations quite as much as in any other area. Perhaps that area should be the first to be abandoned under the values most people follow. You and we feel differently, but for most people we suspect it's just easier to watch one more commercial television fantasy, and even for the dedicated and truly interested it's easier to put off doing what should be done until one feels a bit better and more capable of coping with it.

In general, we suspect that the broad strategy of the obfuscators is paying off again. They were set back by your books, and other books, and by the Shaw trial, but they counted upon time and weariness and the steady growth of alienation and the increasing burden of living to dull the interest and determination of those who would not accept the official fairy story. They know it can be done. Lots of people know that several people were tried and hanged for conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln, yet John Wilkes Booth remains the popular lone and unaided villain.

And values change, and they change particularly among the wonderful young people who are our only hope. Two or three years ago Hal had no trouble organizing a class to work on the problem. Today, I doubt if he could find even two or three to enter such a class, assuming he himself had the inclination, time and resources to conduct one.

So we would agree with you: try to decide what should be most effective and concentrate on that. We don't know what it is, but if anyone does, you should. One suggestion could live with youth, which will make up the majority of voters in a few years. Already the kids know the official story is garbage, simply because it's the official story. The problem is to make them realize that this particular bit of garbage is the worst pollutant of all, so rotten that decent government and life in this country has become impossible until it is recognized and exorcized, and that none of the other garbage will yield until this fundamental and most-easily=exposed bit is dealt with head-on.

One of our problems is our anachronistic electoral process with its corollary two-party system, which prevents our administrations from being as responsive to popular pressure as European governments. If we had had a responsible system of government, we could have rid ourselves of LBJ long before we did because of the credibility gap over the war. I have said from the beginning, and I still believe, that any party or presidential candidate that came out openly for solving the assassinations and cleansing the national soul, and showed it meant business, could win in a walk. This is not at all in prospect with the present system, and not even likely if there are more than two parties, but the coming majority of youth could provide an opportunity for something of this nature to take place.

It is not going to happen if youth goes on a big religious trip, as it shows some very depressing signs of doing. Nor is it going to happen if psychedelic dreams become much more popular. Hard drugs are not yet the mass escapist device that commercial television has been for the elders, but there is that tendency among youth. There is also a counter tendency, and one of the most encouraging things we have encountered recently was Eldridge Cleaver's denunciation, and total rejection, of Tim Leary and "the whole silly psychedelic cult." The revolution, he said, needs clear heads "because we're up against murderous, fascist pigs." Good young people -- and the vast majority are the best I have ever seen or heard about -- do not need to be revolutionaries to understand this message.

We don't pretend, in trying to answer your fine letter, that we can offer you any worthwhile advice, or that we can discern any clear answers. We can offer only what you seemed to invite, the considered reaction to your thoughts by a couple of people who have changed neither their minds nor their values. As I said, what we have been trying to do becomes more and more difficult. It never was easy, partly because were were poorly prepared, but there has been such a speedup in my office in the past three years that I have much less energy than before, and this is not just because I am older. We're both in good health. It's just that nothing much really works any more if you depend on other people, and one winds up doing virtually everything one's self. We've also had a lot of illness at my office recently, and increasingly I am having to give up half my weekends to overtime work, as everyone else is, of course.

But thus far we have managed to keep our modest operation down to proportions that can be dealt with, even if we do fall behind. And we have no intention of stopping, however futile what we do may appear to others. We refuse to be brainwashed, period. To be truthful, the lady with whom I have the honor to be associated would never permit it.

As always,

Jim

jdw

Message from On High: The letter scale really works, and was intended for a midnight letter-writer who might thereby be saved a trip to the Post Office, assuming his mailman will pick up mail from thebbx. If you already have a letter scale, pass it on to some theoretically deserving soul.